

WASHINGTON – Today, Committee on House Administration Chairman Dan Lungren, R-Calif., made the following statement on the House floor in support of H.R. 359, legislation eliminating taxpayer financing of presidential election campaigns and party conventions:

*“Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of H.R. 359, terminating taxpayer financing of presidential election campaigns and party conventions.*

*“We find ourselves at a unique juncture in the longstanding debate over this issue, but frankly, in reality it is a juncture no longer. Taxpayer financing of presidential elections and party conventions is simply no longer defensible.*

*“The first tax liability contributions from American taxpayers diverted toward the funding of presidential elections began 35 years ago, in 1976. This new practice was supposed to raise the public’s trust in their government as well as increase both the number of candidates, and thus electoral competition, and the financial footing between parties. Mr. Chairman, it has failed on all accounts.*

*“Since 1976, approximately 1.5 billion dollars has been spent on this unnecessary system. As we speak, there is a balance of 195 million dollars sitting in the Presidential Election Campaign Fund at the Treasury Department. And yet, this system of electoral subsidization has not changed the public’s perception of our presidential elections or our politics. According to one survey after another, Americans continue to harbor deep distrust of their elected officials, so does anyone think our presidential elections over the past 35 years have shown a virtuous progression toward more accuracy and more honesty? I think not.*

*“Mr. Chairman, prominent presidential candidates, candidates who even believed in this system, have opted out of this taxpayer financing scheme in recent years. In 2004 and 2008, several candidates declined public financing for their primary campaigns. During the most recent presidential election, for the first time, a nominee of one of our two main political parties withdrew from public financing during the general election and instead went on to raise record amounts of money for his campaign.*

*“In addition to presidential primaries and general elections, Mr. Chairman, if there is anything the American taxpayer should not be subsidizing, it is week-long presidential conventions. I enjoy being at them and they are grand, fun, occasions, but they are weeklong party gatherings that are almost entirely symbolic. One can’t even argue something important is being decided because they ceased to have any significant power long ago. Taxpayers would be shocked if not outraged to discover they have been funding these extravagant photo-ops.*

*“As I mentioned, since 1976, approximately 1.5 billion dollars has been spent on publically funding our presidential primaries, our presidential general elections, and our presidential party*

*conventions. The American taxpayer has paid enough for this unwise experiment. It should be ended and the balance in the Presidential Election Campaign Fund and Presidential Primary Matching Payment Account returned to the Treasury to be used for deficit reduction. According to a 2010 Congressional Budget Office estimate, the elimination of this program will save American taxpayers 617 million dollars over the next ten years.*

*“In 1980 the percentage of taxpayers participating through their tax form checkoff was 28.7%. In '85 it was 23%. In '90 it was 19.5%. In '95 it was 12.9%. In 2000, it was 11.5%. In '05 it was 9.1%, and according to IRS data obtained from the FEC, the checkoff rate in 2010 was 7.3%.*

*“This candidate and convention subsidy is obviously unpopular. To paraphrase one former member of the Federal Election Commission, ‘Any system of public financing must have popular support to succeed. Today’s low taxpayer checkoff rates cast serious doubt on whether the public financing system has this support. . . . When only one in [now 13] taxpayers are participating, it is very difficult to conclude that the public financing system has broad popular support.’*

*“As we promised in the Pledge to America and as we have promised here on the Floor during these initial weeks of the 112th Congress – and as we have verified by our transparency-enhancing Rules Package, our bipartisan votes to trim Congress’s budget and end excessive congressional printing, by our determination to return discretionary spending to FY2008 levels or less, and now through this bill – this Republican Majority is committed to fiscal stewardship, to having a relentless eye toward waste and inefficiency, and to a continued commitment throughout this 112th Congress to reduce spending, create private sector jobs, and produce meaningful legislation that makes long-lasting reforms.*

*“Mr. Chairman, this bill introduced by my colleague from Oklahoma should garner overwhelming bipartisan support. I thank him for introducing it and for his commitment to a more responsible and efficient stewardship of taxpayer dollars. I urge all my colleagues to support H.R. 359.”*